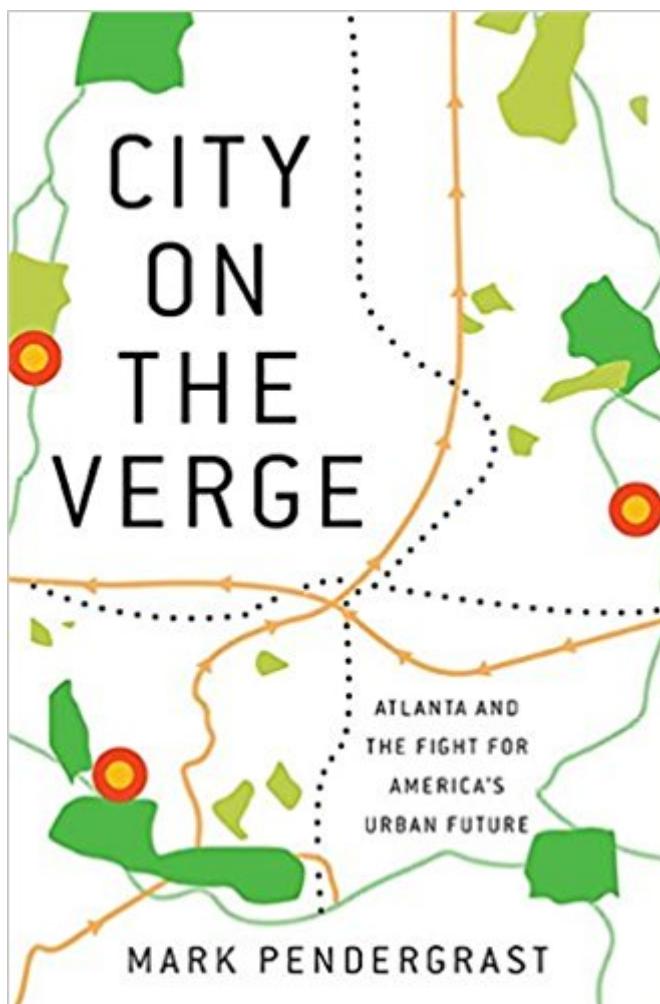


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# City On The Verge: Atlanta And The Fight For America's Urban Future



## **Synopsis**

What we can learn from Atlanta's struggle to reinvent itself in the 21st CenturyAtlanta is on the verge of tremendous rebirth—or inexorable decline. A kind of Petri dish for cities struggling to reinvent themselves, Atlanta has the highest income inequality in the country, gridlocked highways, suburban sprawl, and a history of racial injustice. Yet it is also an energetic, brash young city that prides itself on pragmatic solutions.Today, the most promising catalyst for the city's rebirth is the BeltLine, which the New York Times described as "a staggeringly ambitious engine of urban revitalization." A long-term project that is cutting through forty-five neighborhoods ranging from affluent to impoverished, the BeltLine will complete a twenty-two-mile loop encircling downtown, transforming a massive ring of mostly defunct railways into a series of stunning parks connected by trails and streetcars. Acclaimed author Mark Pendergrast presents a deeply researched, multi-faceted, up-to-the-minute history of the biggest city in America's Southeast, using the BeltLine saga to explore issues of race, education, public health, transportation, business, philanthropy, urban planning, religion, politics, and community. An inspiring narrative of ordinary Americans taking charge of their local communities, City of the Verge provides a model for how cities across the country can reinvent themselves.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Douglas Blackmon, Wall Street Journal:"City on the Verge is a deeply researched effort to capture [the city's] history and, along the way, paint a portrait of Atlanta's neighborhoods, from the still elite

area where the author spent his childhood to bustling zones of gentrification and immovable pockets of desperation."Kirkus Reviews:"A lively urban history, charting Atlanta's growth and linking it to political developments over time... [Pendergrast] is generally optimistic, even in a time when taxpayers are reluctant to shoulder the burden of improving the commonweal: 'Change is in the air in Atlanta,' he writes, 'mostly for the good.'... A welcome look at a city-a mass of cities-not often heard from in the urban-studies literature and of wide interest well beyond the I-95 corridor."Publishers Weekly:"Pendergrast, an Atlanta native, devotes this detailed study to how the city [Atlanta] might be revived and reimagined for the 21st century. Mixing planning, history, and personal anecdotes, he describes an urban renewal project's path from grassroots idea to \$4 billion project.... Pendergrast has an obvious love for both the city and the energy behind the BeltLine project."Library Journal:"An enchanting story of a Sunbelt city that will captivate both urban planners and the general public. An Atlanta native, the author brings an engaging and insightful voice to this work, and his research is meticulously thorough."Seven Days:"Offering both an account of Atlanta's tumultuous history and an anatomical breakdown of the BeltLine project so far, Pendergrast situates City on the Verge within the larger context of urban America's future. A must-read for urban-planning junkies, it should also appeal to those interested in community building and the oft-charged politics of the built environment."City on the Verge is a must read for city-builders, urbanists, and anyone who cares about our future. Sunbelt cities like Atlanta are booming, attracting people from across the country and remaking themselves from sprawling suburban areas to more dynamic urban centers. With a journalist's eye for detail and a writerly knack for great story-telling, Mark Pendergrast takes us inside the forces and actors that are transforming Atlanta and the urban world we live in." -Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* and of *The New Urban Crisis*"Atlanta colleagues used to joke that Atlanta was the "Public Health Capital of the US" because it had CDC, the Carter Center, and good hospitals. "No," I would argue, "There aren't enough sidewalks, scarcely anywhere to walk, and parks are too few and poorly accessible. The place seems built only for car drivers and country club members. In Mark Pendergrast's excellent book, we see how Atlanta is going from a fat city to a healthy one with the help of the BeltLine and good leadership." -Dr. Richard Jackson, former Director, CDC National Center for Environmental Health, and author of *Designing Healthy Communities*"Atlanta is creating something unique among American cities: a green network of more than 20 new or expanded parks occupying 1,300 acres, connected by multi-use trails and new transit lines, encircling the entire city and connecting 45 neighborhoods. City on the Verge describes how this BeltLine, for which I prepared the initial master plan, overcame financing problems, litigation, power struggles, politics, property rights, and

topographical reality, to become a major recreational resource that is already enhancing the daily life for tens of thousands of Atlantans." -Alexander Garvin, architect, city planner, and author of *What Makes a Great City*"In the late 20th century, metro Atlanta became the fastest growing human settlement in world history; the poster child of sprawl. With the building of the rail-and-trail BeltLine, it will once again lead the country, but toward a walkable urban future. Every metro area in the country will consider building a BeltLine. Mark Pendergrast's book is required reading to understand the future of metropolitan America." -Christopher Leinberger, metropolitan land use strategist and author of *The Option of Urbanism*"City on the Verge tells the story of the many Atlantas that are coming together through the creation of the Atlanta BeltLine. While this convergence is at times painful and uncomfortable, it is also long overdue. Thanks to Mark Pendergrast for presenting his insightful observations about our past, our present, and the opportunity before us as we approach the future." -Michael Halicki, Executive Director, Park Pride"Atlanta is indeed a City on the Verge, as Mark Pendergrast observes-it aspires to remake itself into a vital, sustainable, livable mecca. Pendergrast weaves together lessons in urban design, local politics, history, and human nature that pull the reader in like a mystery. His book reinforces the famous Margaret Meade quote about the ability of a small group of dedicated people to bring about change." -Dennis Creech, co-founder of Southface Energy Institute"Other than Atlantans interested in their roots, current socioeconomic challenges and future growth, as well as planners, sociologists, community developers and the like, who should read *City on the Verge*? The answer is anybody who recognizes the imperative of building more sustainable cities and who would appreciate an engaging urban history explaining how the BeltLine project came about, in tandem with alternating chapters exploring relevant Atlanta history in key areas such as race and public health."-Marilyn Gates, *New York Journal of Books*"Although the sheer amount of detail and information could easily come across as dry or slogging, Pendergrast does an impeccable job of couching the heavy data in narrative or scene, allowing the general reader to remain hooked and propelled through each chapter.... *City on the Verge* is a must-read for Atlantans who wish to know their city, who are invested in its future. ...The plans and analysis here can also serve as a model for cities across the nation. Those in governance and community leadership should be required to read *City on the Verge*, as the synthesis here is unmatched. But more urgently, this is, simply, for the people."-Amber Nicole Brooks, *ArtsATL*

Mark Pendergrast was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and is the author of eleven books, including *Uncommon Grounds* and *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*. He lives in Vermont.[MarkPendergrast.com](http://MarkPendergrast.com)

I'll have to hand it to author Mark Pendergrast - he's done a helluva lot of homework in putting together a very detailed history of the development of the Atlanta BeltLine, an ambitious multi-use path encircling the City of Atlanta in abandoned rail corridors. In between chapters about the BeltLine are chapters on the history of Atlanta, with an emphasis on the racial divide that still exists. It's all well organized, even if the development of the BeltLine has had such a turbulent up-and-down history that it's difficult at times to follow the action with so many different people, political entities, and organizations involved, all of them with their own agendas. And the author does a nice job of showing how projects like the construction of the Atlanta BeltLine can be the nexus for changing the face of the city as more people move back into the city and population density increases, making mass transit, walking, and bicycling more viable. But this may or may not happen, as there are many questions to be answered and billions of dollars of funding to be found. Will paved pathways that connect predominantly white neighborhoods with black neighborhoods be accepted? Will transit be included in the BeltLine corridors? How does the City of Atlanta ensure that affordable housing for the poor will be provided by developers? And will the residents along the Beltway accept high-rise high-density apartments and condos? The author addresses these issues, but they'll be ongoing arguments for at least a couple of more decades. For the present, only one short section of the BeltLine has actually been constructed. The author was born in Atlanta in 1948, but later moved away from the city. I was born in Atlanta in 1946, but I never left, living in the suburbs most of my life, but never more than twenty miles from downtown Atlanta. So I've personally seen the events he describes in the book as Atlanta grew from a sleepy Southern town of half a million residents at the end of World War II, into a metropolis of six million people today - and still growing, sprawling out into areas that were once seriously rural. Many years ago, I was the state DOT's project manager for the design of a downtown multimodal passenger terminal (MMPT) that would serve the Amtrak Crescent, intercity and local buses, and six commuter rail lines. It was never built because the Georgia legislature refused to fund it. And now that's a lost dream, since the eastern segment of the Atlanta BeltLine is running over what was formerly Norfolk Southern tracks that would have brought the Crescent and one of the commuter rail lines into the MMPT. The book covers the state's objections to giving up that track, but in the end, the BeltLine prevailed. I just wonder what the future ramifications of that decision will be. But I'm digressing. The bottom line: Mark Pendergrast's book is a treasure trove of information for anyone interested in the development of the Atlanta BeltLine and how projects associated with the BeltLine may transform Atlanta over the coming decades.

This is a fascinating story about a city trying to reinvent itself on the back of an idea that began as a college thesis. It should make for a fascinating book. Unfortunately, it reads like a college thesis -- dry as a bone in a style that makes for great bedtime reading as you won't get past two pages without falling asleep. Someday I plan to finish it, likely around the time the belt line is completed. I don't mean to be snide; I've lived in Atlanta since the 70s and am thrilled the city is finally starting to realize the potential of urban living (as opposed to the exurban sprawl that has categorized it since at least the 60s). I recommend both the book as well as an exploration of the belt line (I live four blocks from it), but offer the humble suggestion that if you want to get people excited about an idea, write a story, not a monograph.

I live in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and recognize all the areas mentioned in this book. Some of the history leading to the problems and opportunities discussed was very interesting, and helpful in understanding how important for the city and indeed the entire region for this to continue and succeed. A very recommended read for anyone interested in history and the importance of infrastructure to move beyond a car only culture.

Brilliant book chronicling Atlanta's urban development through exploring the short history of the beltline. Would definitely recommend.

thanks, quick and very good book, lots of info on Atlanta

Great history of Atlanta. Good detail of neighbors.

I happen to be at Barnes and Noble when Mr. Pendergrast gave a talk about his new book, and also happened to be leaving for vacation the following week and needed a beach book. It piqued my interest, as I live 1/2 mile from the newest section of the Beltline, and because I am always interested in Atlanta history. Wow. This book is extremely well researched and fascinating. It chronicles the traditionally racially divided city and how Atlanta came to be as it is today - from affluent enclaves like Brookwood Hills to the likes of blighted Grove Park. I've lived intown Atlanta for several decades but was still introduced to many new areas, and feel like I walked away with a little kernal of insight into each. The author tours each neighborhood on the Beltline foot and gets to know some residents. He also goes OTP and takes a look at surrounding areas - and with

meticulously researched history - provides a bigger picture of how Atlanta is changing. Or rather, how Atlanta is struggling to change for the better - to achieve a healthier, more walkable, connected, equitable, community. But, it is a tremendous struggle. And I now have a better grasp why, what the obstacles are, and who the players are. And though the book is centered on the Beltline, it is far more about what it means to be a community, given so many differences, traditions, and changes. I am inspired to get more involved myself to help shape the change I want to see, as the author details many community activists who have already made a difference and gotten the Beltline project this far. So, thank you for writing this book, Mr. Pendergrast! Nice work!

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